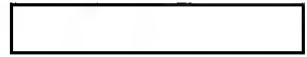


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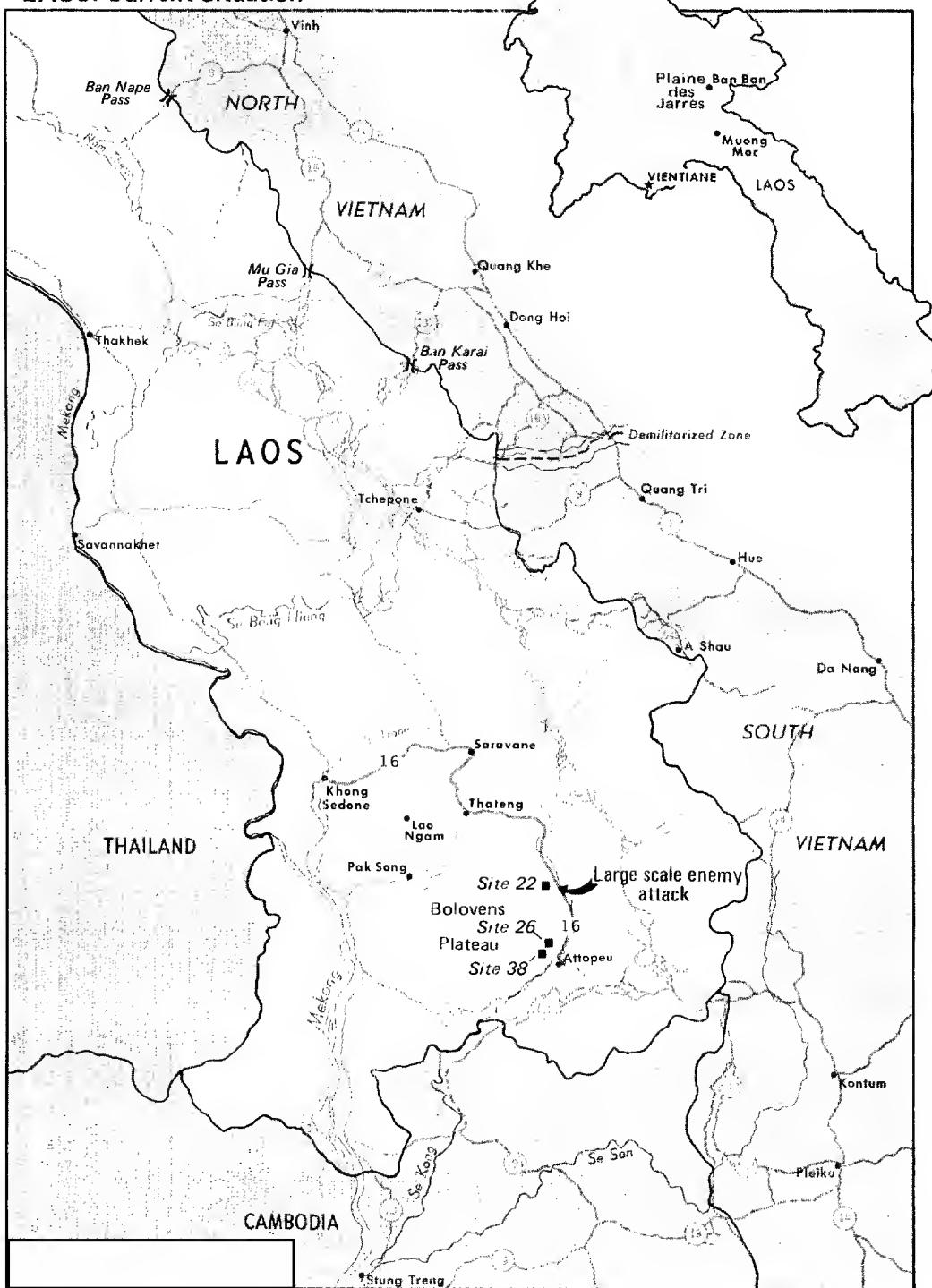
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LAOS: Current Situation



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LAOS: The Communists have renewed their drive to clear government forces from the Bolovens Plateau.

On 5 December, a North Vietnamese force, estimated at from one to three battalions, attacked Site 22, the last major government base on the eastern rim of the plateau. According to the most recent reports, the position was still in government hands, but heavy fighting was continuing. Several smaller sites on the plateau reported enemy activity over the weekend, and one camp was abandoned.

The Communist campaign in the eastern Bolovens, which began during the summer, picked up again two weeks ago with successful attacks on two key government bases, Sites 26 and 38. The importance of this area to the Communists has grown this year because it commands the Se Kong River and Route 16, which presumably are especially important during this dry season.

There is evidence that the Communists also intend to increase pressure along the northern Bolovens. The three irregular battalions that have been sweeping the area north of Pak Song all reported contacts with Communist troops that by 5 December had moved within about five miles of Thateng. There have been several reports of large enemy forces moving into the area southwest of Saravane.

Villagers in the Lao Ngam area have reported that these forces will attack Pak Song in the near future, but it is also possible that the Communists intend to strike targets to the west along Route 16. The enemy reportedly has been moving large quantities of ammunition to an area about ten miles east of Khong Sedone. On 5 December, two NVA companies attacked a village in the same general area, starting a flow of refugees toward Khong Sedone.

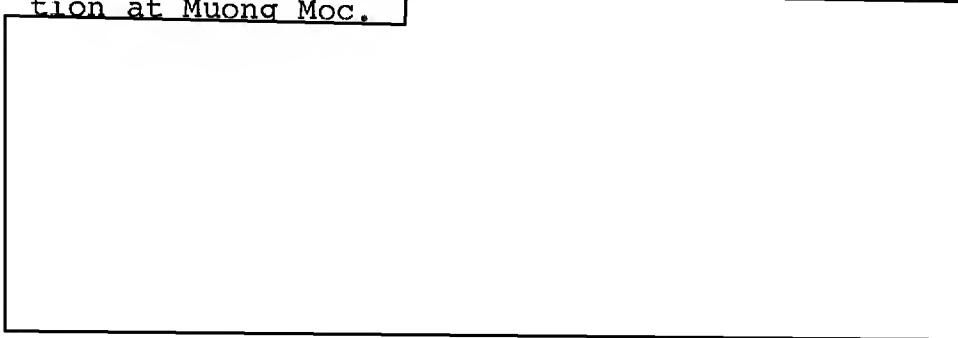
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In northern Laos, government forces east of the Plaine des Jarres are still moving toward the Ban Ban valley without significant opposition. No important fighting has been reported along the Plaine's western perimeter. In southeastern Xieng Khouang Province, the government has evacuated its last position at Muong Moc.

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NATO: [The Allies have firmly established that "satisfactory conclusion" of the Berlin talks will be the key to their participation in multilateral explorations of a conference on European security (CES).]

[The NATO members, at the conclusion of their ministerial meetings in Brussels last week, noted "some progress" in East-West relations since their ministerial last May, but decided that it was not sufficient to warrant multilateral talks. They specified that they would be willing to move to multilateral CES discussions only after the Berlin talks had been successfully concluded and other ongoing talks were "developing favorably." Although for the present this slows movement toward CES, most of the Allies seem ready to agree to multilateral explorations if a satisfactory Berlin agreement can be reached.]

[The Allied ministers renewed what has been since 1966 NATO's counteroffer to the Warsaw Pact's calls for a security conference by again proposing talks on mutual and balanced force reductions. They also offered to consider reductions of foreign forces if such reductions were tied to eventual cuts in indigenous forces. Last June the Pact suggested that it would consider discussing foreign force reductions.]

[The Allies backed up their position on the CES question by approving a report on Allied defense problems in the 1970s which recommends a number of improvements in NATO defense capabilities. Acceptance of the report came amidst unanimous Allied approval of the US pledge to maintain current force levels and improve conventional fighting capabilities. Even French Foreign Minister Schumann, whose government did not participate in the study, welcomed the US pledge and stated that no genuine security in Europe is possible without US participation.]

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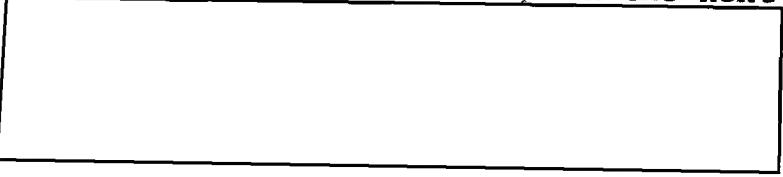
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[The other major Allies added to their expressions of appreciation an agreement in principle to a burden-sharing package of increased commitments to NATO. It appears that the remaining details of the plan will be worked out in the next few months.]



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JAPAN: The Sato government is approaching the pollution issue gingerly.

The government has introduced a dozen pollution-control bills in the current Diet session, but these measures would provide little more than vague guidelines to the various concerned ministries, and there is no indication that the package will be pushed vigorously. The Diet debate and public statements of ruling conservative party and business leaders indicate that as yet there is no consensus on the matter. Even the relatively mild proposals have been attacked by industry organizations as being hastily drafted and superfluous.

Premier Sato is clearly unwilling to tangle decisively with the business community at a time when he badly needs industry's support on the textile issue. There is intense public interest in the pollution problem, however, and the government cannot afford to appear lackadaisical or impotent. The mass media are accusing the government of "selling out" to big-business interests, and in late November a precedent-setting nationwide rally to protest pollution was staged by combined opposition forces.

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INDIA: An expansion of police powers in strife-ridden West Bengal has provoked new political activity.

After months of delay, caused mainly by Communist objections, the Indian President recently assented to a bill arming the West Bengal administration with special powers to deal with leftist extremists. New Delhi assumed direct control over the state last March after the fall of its Communist-dominated government, but the move did not squash West Bengal's Naxalites. The terrorist tactics of these self-proclaimed Maoist revolutionaries have in fact increased since the imposition of President's Rule.

Since March, terrorist attacks have caused some 400 violent deaths and have been increasingly directed toward the police. Moreover, this terrorism has added further burdens to the severely strained economy. There has apparently been some slowdown in extremist attacks since the new bill went into effect on 22 November, but daily attempts to assassinate prominent individuals, police officers, and middle-class peasants still keep the populace on edge.

The new bill has generated opposition among the leftist parties that dominate state politics. Both major coalitions of Bengali leftists have denounced it and have called for a statewide general strike on 8 December. Transportation into Calcutta will be cut off, and the city is expected to be completely shut down. The support of many leftist leaders may be pro forma, however, since most of them probably consider the strike a futile exercise, unlikely to pressure New Delhi into heeding their call for new state elections and a return to representative government in the near future.

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NOTES

KOREA: Pyongyang thus far is following a moderate line toward obtaining the release of the MIG-15 pilot who became lost and crash-landed in South Korea last week. In demanding the pilot's release, both the senior North Korean representative at the Military Armistice Commission meeting and Pyongyang radio have restricted themselves to generally factual terms. The South Koreans, however, are adamantly sticking to their story that the pilot defected and that he will not be returned. The exchange of automatic weapons fire across the Demilitarized Zone on 5 December, the day of the commission meeting, seems unrelated to the pilot incident, but Pyongyang may attempt some retaliatory action if it concludes that there is no hope for the pilot's return.

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CUBA: Havana's latest cabinet change reflects Fidel Castro's continuing search for competence at high administrative levels. Major Antonio Enrique Lusson, who formerly held many high-level military posts, has been named minister of transportation, succeeding Major Faure Chomon. Chomon, who bears a major portion of the responsibility for the transportation problems that have plagued the government, was relegated to a less demanding party position. Although the change is an obvious demotion for Chomon, the maintenance of his party credentials indicates that inefficiency rather than political disfavor caused him to be downgraded.

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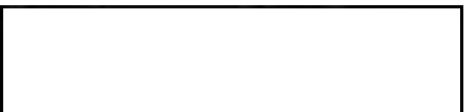
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